

# Naval Surface Group TWO

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“**S**ee these, Sam?” the new commander of Naval Surface Group TWO said as he pointed at his own collars, “Stars . . . *concepts*.” Now pointing across the desk at his chief of staff’s collars, Rear Admiral Thomas “Fly” Fisher finished: “Eagles . . . *details*.”<sup>1</sup>

It had been close to a year since Captain Sam Drum had first heard those words in his welcome aboard meeting as the new Surface Group TWO chief of staff. Now nearing the halfway point in his two-year tour, they still echoed in his mind as he reviewed and updated the admiral’s command briefing that he would take with him on his upcoming trip.

All in all, being chief of staff at Surface Group TWO had turned out to be an interesting job. The admiral, to lead and direct the Group’s day-to-day actions, had given Sam broad authority. That was really a matter of practicality as Admiral Fisher, like most flag officers, was on the road a lot. Most of Fisher’s travel—about 90%—was in his capacity as the deputy to the commander of the newly formed U.S. Naval Forces, Southern Command, or USNAVSO, in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. His USNAVSO duties had the admiral supporting the commander in chief’s theater engagement plan by conducting liaison with the foreign navies of South America, being present for planning and operations of numerous joint exercises, executing the maritime engagement plan, reviewing operational plans, and coordinating a multitude of personnel exchange program assignments. Of late, the *Vieques problem* had only served to focus the admiral more on USNAVSO issues. All this left precious little time for the admiral to “touch the realm” within the Surface Group<sup>2</sup>—that was left to Sam and the Group staff of thirty-four naval personnel.<sup>3</sup>

Reviewing the brief, Sam recalled how little he had really known himself about Surface Group TWO when the surface detailer called to “offer” Sam his orders. But, compared to the standard list of captain options—“to sea or overseas...or retire”—it was hard to pass up.

As he thought about the Group’s performance, he noted that their ships were getting on deployment on time and passing fleet-wide inspections with only the normal smattering of discrepancies—not bad really. Sailors were getting advanced at or above the fleet average and the Group had the “normal” number of legal problems—nothing earth shattering. Traveling around on behalf of the admiral he also noted that in general the morale was pretty good. The staff had good people who all got along together fine. In general, the staff performed its oversight functions for its two Destroyer Squadrons (DESRONS)—SIX and FOURTEEN—well, and the staff enjoyed good relationships with the subordinate

commands. All in all, a good command to be part of—maybe even one of those “best kept secrets” that people in the Navy like to talk about.

The history slide in the briefing showed that Surface Group TWO had only come into being in February 2000—a pretty young organization by Navy standards, Sam thought. Perhaps due to its somewhat ad hoc origins, the whole Group organization had the look and feel of a quick, cookie-cutter fix by the Navy to respond to the U.S. Southern Command requirement to stand up USNAVSO.<sup>4</sup> What made Surface Group TWO a different beast from the other traditional “war fighting” Groups and DESRONs never seemed to be taken into consideration. Sam reflected:

- Carrier Group and Cruiser-Destroyer Group staffs are sea-duty commands. As such, the staffs work up and deploy with their units as part of their battle group; Surface Group TWO staff is a shore-based command that provides oversight but does not deploy.
- Surface Group TWO’s seventeen units train, deploy, and operate mostly independently from other ships in the Group as well as their own DESRON. Other DESRONs work together with the *battle group* serving as the *focus* for their collective efforts.
- Surface Group TWO got all of the “cats and dogs” types of missions like counter-drugs, UNITAS, support to the Standing Naval Forces, Atlantic—a NATO naval force—and the Great Lakes *deployment*—all important but, nonetheless, missions that do not generally evoke the respect and professional envy of fellow surface warriors.

Of these missions, Sam saw counter-drug operations and support to UNITAS as the two major responsibilities placed on Surface Group TWO by its mission statement. As he read the mission statement closely, Sam noted that it didn’t even have the sound or feel of a war fighting mission. Carrier and Cruiser-Destroyer groups trained to “fight” together and brought their units to the fight. Surface Group TWO’s statement had them training units—singular—and providing their units to another organization who would employ them in the fight—it sounded “passive.”

Western Hemisphere Group/Naval Surface Group TWO  
History Timeline

- Jun 1995 CWHG as an ISIC and Deployable Staff (CTF 125)
  - Caribbean and South American contingency support
  - Bilateral exercise support
  - Counter-drug operations
  - UNITAS support
  - Standing Naval Forces Atlantic support
- Feb 1996 Appointed CINCLANTFLT's Executive Agent to SOUTHCOM
- Oct 1996 CINCLANTFLT expands CWHG role and assigns CWHG operational control of USN ships in SOUTHCOM area of responsibility
- Aug 1998 CWHG operational control expanded to include aircraft
- Aug 1999 DESRON FOURTEEN becomes ISIC for 10 CWHG ships
- Dec 1999 DESRON SIX becomes ISIC for 6 CWHG ships
- Feb 2000 COMUSNAVSO stood up as SOUTHCOM naval component commander.
  - CWHG re-named Naval Surface Group TWO
  - COMNAVSURFGRU TWO assigned as deputy COMUSNAVSO

Mission

COMMANDER, NAVAL SURFACE GROUP TWO (CNSG-2) SERVES AS IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR-IN-COMMAND FOR COMMANDER, DESTROYER SQUADRON FOURTEEN LOCATED IN MAYPORT, FL AND COMMANDER, DESTROYER SQUADRON SIX LOCATED IN PASCAGOULA, MS. CNSG-2 PROVIDES SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT OF UNIT LEVEL AND INTEGRATED TRAINING AND READINESS FOR THE GROUP. IN ADDITION, CNSG-2 MAINTAINS ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS AND MATERIAL READINESS SUPPORT FOR THE SHIPS AND SQUADRONS ASSIGNED TO THE GROUP. CNSG-2 REPORTS TO COMMANDER, NAVAL SURFACE FORCE, U.S. ATLANTIC FLEET.

As he finished up the morning business of “keeping the train running,” Sam reviewed the general court-martial docket, and looked ahead to the afternoon line up. Besides an afternoon “planning” meeting with the admiral, only another round of force protection/anti-terrorism meetings with the naval station stood in the way of an evening of fishing. It was funny—maybe really sad—that administrative functions, like court martial convening authority<sup>5</sup> and those duties stemming from Admiral Fisher’s responsibilities as the senior officer present afloat, or SOPA,<sup>6</sup> for Mayport, that were not all a part of the official mission statement, actually ate up most of Sam’s day.

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“Sam, I looked at the brief you forwarded up and it looks good. But, I’ve been thinking about the organization,” the admiral started. “I’ve been aboard for six months now and from what I can tell, this Surface Group struggles with a real *identity problem*. Let me elaborate a bit on this.”

“The *first of the two identity problems* is a *group-wide* one. It’s probably the product of this most recent reorganization. Surface Group TWO was slapped together as an organization that sometimes seems to operate as many separate parts—the staff, each of the two DESRONs, and the ships. Each of the DESRONs, in turn, have ships that are sent to the four winds to operate independently and do any number of missions. Each DESRON and maybe even the ships has its own measure of success and peculiar resource issues. There is no singular focus on a larger organizational strategy or purpose—just twenty or more separate parts in loose orbit trying to meet the changing schedule. We’re fortunate that we have great people—we’re blessed with an organization that is rich in experience and diversely talented. We do a good job every day satisfying our principal mission. I’d argue that we do our mission as well or better than any other group in the Navy. Generally speaking, we’re doing a fine job getting ships and crews ready to do the same mission that we’ve always done—hot, straight and normal.”

“So, if we’re meeting the schedule and getting the job done well, where is the down side admiral?” Sam interjected.

“Sam, the world is changing, missions are changing, and though Surface Group TWO is doing fine, we are stuck in a rut doing the same things the way that we have always done them—always fine, never better and never worse. To some, that’s good enough. To me, that’s the definition of ‘mediocre.’ And I’m not used to being part of an organization that is not in the van. ‘Good enough’ just isn’t,” the admiral said as he moved out to the edge of his chair. “I suppose I could be a ‘steady as you go’ kind of admiral, but that’s not why I was put here. If you and I don’t give this organization the context and purpose on which to frame the decisions of today and tomorrow, then who will? We owe Surface Group TWO and the Navy better than that.”

Sam was red-faced. He’d been so busy keeping the daily flames down and managing the present that he hadn’t even begun to think about leading the organization toward some future.

“I was thinking,” the admiral continued, “we have a new administration. The White House and Secretary Rumsfeld are focused on the future and transformation of the Defense Department. Out of any new strategy will come new or different force structures, as well as changing roles and missions. The president has got a real eye on improving relations in Central and South America. With the former commander in chief of the U.S. Southern Command, General Pace, moving on to be the next vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, our theater of operations has never been so visible. There’s talk of homeland defense—don’t even know what that means to us. Battle groups may or may not see much change in the next five to ten years, but our organization has a history of roles and mission changes to suit the *cause du jour* in this hemisphere. We can count on change and we might be able to take advantage of it to minimize the whiplash for our people by making sure that Surface Group TWO is poised to be the most responsive of any of the nation’s battle groups. Sam, we need to know *where we are headed as an organization*. Not where we’re headed this week or even this year, but five or ten years down the road. I suspect that if I were to ask our staff, the DESRON commodores, or ship commanding officers that question, I would get three different answers, if I got an answer at all.

“The *second identity problem* is really integral to the first and that is this *staff’s function* in the Group. We can’t change the way that Surface Group TWO and all of its parts evolved, but in order to solve this identity problem, we need to decide how active our role can or should be in leading our Group onto deployment.

“I had a strategic plan when I commanded the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes and it worked well for me there. It pulled the separate but interrelated parts of that base and surrounding community together into an organized whole—I want one here. Along those lines, you should know that logically my top five priorities are the same as the CNO’s<sup>7</sup>—current and future readiness, manpower, quality of service and Navy-wide alignment toward a common purpose.<sup>8</sup> How we define those top five in the context of Surface Group TWO is part of what we need to work out. Our common goal as we move toward that purpose or direction is continuous performance improvement and an ever increasing standard of excellence in satisfying our mission and support to our customers.”<sup>9</sup>

Sam interjected. “Admiral, here’s something that I’ve been thinking about. One thing that is inconsistent in the way business is done is that the Pacific Fleet also provides ship support to SOUTHCOM’s counter-drug efforts. Right now, the Pacific Fleet ship USS *David Ray* (DD-971) is down west of Panama, while our ship, the USS *R. G. Bradley* (FFG-49), is doing counter-drug ops in the Caribbean. There was no connection between their training, readiness, and deployment work-ups and ours. Perhaps our vision might be that Surface Group TWO becomes the Navy’s “battle group” for assets deploying to SOUTHCOM, regardless of whether they are Atlantic or Pacific-based. We could work up and certify all deploying units.<sup>10</sup> Thoughts, admiral?”

“Well that’s a broader vision than I had in mind but it’s not bad. It has distinct rice bowl implications. But, from my deputy USNAVSO hat, it definitely has merit. The Navy should have standardized work-up exercises and manuals for counter-drug operations, but we

don't. We do the whole counter-drug operation on an ad hoc basis. Not that we do things poorly, we're just always reacting vice leading. This ought to get a high level of real interest. My bumper sticker is *that if we're in a war on drugs, then counter-drug ops are a wartime mission*. A lot of people will argue with that statement but we really are shooting at and sinking drug runners down in the Caribbean and if we're going to do that as a mission, then we ought to approach it with the same planning and rigor that we give our other wartime missions.<sup>11</sup> And we ought to resource it appropriately, as well. The counter-drug business continues to change and has changed on the edges in terms of the technology that we use too. But there are huge parts of the business that have not changed to keep up. Surface Group TWO has the most experience in this regard. We need to find ways to do our job better, more efficiently, and more effectively. In particular, more effectively in the training and equipping for the South American missions including counter-drug ops."<sup>12</sup>

"We've got plenty of smart folks here Sam—knock it around with them; see what you come up with. As you know, I'm heading off on another trip. I don't know exactly what the right *vision-thing* for Surface Group TWO should be, but I want you to do some research and give me your recommendations on how we ought to go about developing one. If we're going to solve this identity problem, we're going to need to have an organization that clearly knows what it's about, where we are today, and where we're headed tomorrow. We need to be very clear about what this staff does in the organizational chain and for whom. We need to stake out a niche on which to build our organization and lead it in that direction. Any questions?" the admiral concluded.

"Probably more than I know to ask sir," Sam said.

"Maybe so," the admiral responded. "Look, Sam, it took me over a year to develop a strategic plan at Great Lakes, this doesn't happen overnight. I'd like your first brief on the way ahead in three months and we'll take it from there. Remember, Sam," the admiral said as he smiled and pointed across the table at his chief of staff's collars—"*details*."

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Back in his office Sam transcribed his cryptic notes from his *wheel book* into a larger steno pad. He figured he would need a bit more space for this project.

"Captain," LCDR Tim Ray interrupted, "I've got the report from the manpower review and I need your signature on the forwarding letter for this updated COMNAVSURFGRUTWO instruction."

LCDR Tim Ray was an outstanding flag secretary who also ran the SURFGRU Administrative Department (N1). As both, he was a pretty busy man but kept the balls in the air better than anybody. Because he also saw all of the group administration and attended meetings with or on behalf of the admiral, he was a wealth of information and a great sounding board. A former second-class machinist mate with an industrial management master's out of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, his LCDR rank belied his maturity and insight. Sam

could count on him to provide a seasoned view. He'd be leaving for his XO ride in a year and that was unfortunate for the organization and the next chief of staff.

"What's your view of Surface Group TWO? What are the big manpower issues? I've got this small strategic planning project and I'd value your opinions," Sam asked.

Tim jumped in: "It's safe to say that the Group staff's manpower will be taking on a different look with these manpower changes. Overall, the staff's manning will be decreasing as we go from 34 officer and enlisted billets down to 32 total billets. That may not sound like much of a loss, but on a small staff like ours, two billets can create challenges. The real change as the command master chief and I see it is the loss of four active duty enlisted billets and the addition of our first two civil servant billets. To Atlantic Fleet manpower gurus, it all boils down to money, and the civilian billets supposedly mean a savings of \$75,391.00.<sup>13</sup> Some on the staff think the money saved may not justify the gains."

"Where's the bad in that, Tim?" Sam asked. "This may give us some continuity to offset military transfers."

"I'm not saying it's bad—it's just going to be different. We're going to lose watchstanders which means other Sailors will have to pick up the slack. For better or worse, we can call our Sailors in at all hours of the night or on weekends to meet emergent problems, but you can't do that with civilians. You don't have the same control over their leave and the civilian performance reports, pay, and administration is just different. Seems like all you hear is hiring and firing horror stories. Civilian personnel matters are just one more reason to get into long meetings with the naval base. I can work with anyone, sir, but this one could be a challenge. Also, that means two less shore duty billets in Mayport for Sailors to rotate to. I don't know how you put a price tag on all of that.

"On the upside, advancements and retention are doing well group-wide—better than fleet average in some cases. Surface Group TWO has the 'distinction' of being both the best and the worst in the Atlantic Fleet in that regard—Pascagoula still has its struggles . . ." Tim trailed off. "Captain, I've got to rush to get these letters into the admiral for his signature before he heads out of town again. I remember one month where I only saw him three days."<sup>14</sup>

"Yeah, I remember all too well, Tim. How's his trip shaping up this time?" Sam asked.

"He'll be spending the next week on a round-robin that takes him to Norfolk for the flag conference, then up to DC, and finally down to Roost Roads. COMUSNAVSO wants to discuss the upcoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff trip to Panama. Admiral Fisher, as USNAVSO's deputy commander, will be representing SOUTHCOM on that trip. With the requisite debriefs following the Panama trip, I don't expect to see the boss back in town for some time. Guess that means you've got the deck and the con again, eh captain?"

"It's good to be king." Sam chuckled. Before he left for the day, Sam made an appointment with his reserve coordinator and material readiness department heads. Sam always

appreciated their candor and thoughts on tough matters. Maybe they'd have an idea how to tackle this tasker.

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The car ferry ride across the St. Johns River toward home always gave Sam a welcome chance to reflect on the day and put things in perspective. This Group, he thought, really was a collection of “cats and dogs.” The complexity was mind-boggling and the geographic separation of homeports only made it tougher to make the three parts of the organization see themselves as part of a larger whole.

At fifteen years old, the three Ticonderoga-class AEGIS cruisers in Pascagoula were among the oldest in the Navy and were the only non-vertical launch system (VLS)-equipped cruisers on the East Coast. *Yorktown* was the Navy's “Smart Ship” prototype—sort of a floating *skunk works* for efficient crew manning technologies.<sup>15</sup> The “figs” (short for frigates or FFGs) were all Perry-class and fifteen to twenty years old. Of them, *Estocin* and *Morrison* were the oldest and would likely be transferred or decommissioned in the near future.<sup>16</sup> Of the eight naval reserve force (NRF) FFGs in the Navy's inventory, Surface Group TWO had five and the rest were in the Pacific Fleet.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, there was the *O'Bannon*—the only Spruance-class destroyer in the Group. Seeing that “Spru-can” in Mayport spawned fond old memories for both the admiral who commanded *Stump* and Sam who commanded *Ingersoll*. At twenty years old, the *O'Bannon* was the only Tomahawk shooter in the Group.<sup>18</sup>

All totaled: three cruisers, thirteen frigates, and one destroyer—undersea warfare capable ships that saw little use of their capabilities in the SOUTHCOM theater except as part of the UNITAS exercise. For the counter-drug mission, armed helos and small boats to assist the Coast Guard law enforcement detachments in making counter-drug arrests at sea replaced the ASW helos.

Though the admiral seemed most focused on the counter-drug mission and UNITAS, the operations and personnel tempos of the force really went beyond that, Sam thought. Surface Group TWO units supported myriad contingency operations through the years, including: alien migration assistance, non-combatant evacuation operations, humanitarian assistance, maritime interdiction operations, and foreign disaster ops. If it happened in the Caribbean through the 1990s, they'd certainly been involved and would be again in the future, if a contingency arose.

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“The USS *Estocin*, one of our NRF FFGs up in Norfolk, won the CINCLANTFLT ‘Golden Anchor’ Award for retention again,” Captain Rick Trigger, USNR, the Surface Group's reserve coordinator crowed proudly. “She owns the quarterly Fleet-wide Retention Honor Roll! In fact, *Estocin* has won that honor nine consecutive times by re-enlisting 62% of all eligible Sailors—6% above fleet average—how do we bottle that and spread it around the Group?”<sup>19</sup>

"I'm working on a strategic planning tasker for the admiral, Rick. Can you give me a refresher on the NRF?" Sam asked.

"Sure Sam." Rick leaned forward in his chair. "NRF ships are different in two significant ways: manning and funding," Rick began.

"Manning-wise, the active FFGs have 13 officers and 210 enlisted always assigned; the NRF figs have a total of 173 active and Training and Administration of Reserves (TAR) personnel permanently-assigned who coordinate the ship's reserve augment of about 50 drilling selected reservists (SELRES). The SELRES come from six Reserve Readiness Commands from all around the nation. Sam, these are a very professional group of Sailors—proud of what they do for their two-to-four week drill periods. When they're not doing their active duty for training,<sup>20</sup> they're working as highly skilled laborers or executives in industry. That brings better practices and methods to our fleet maintenance. They can be pretty influential, too. I'm not sure if it's true for any of our reservists, but some reservists are in the U.S. or state Congresses. I even knew of one reserve officer who was a millionaire CEO—he just drilled out of pride and wanted to do something for his country.

"Anyway, SELRES also form fifteen FFG Augment Units and six DESRON Maintenance Units. These folks provide our units with a very valuable skilled workforce pool to help active duty units meet their surge upkeep needs. They also fill in for active duty personnel, breaking them free to go off for training or on leave. That's a good deal for commanding officers. I know some may see the reserves as a readiness or manpower challenge, but I think the taxpayer gets their money's worth from the services that the SELRES provide."

"I don't recall any direct organizational connection or responsibility to the commander, Naval Reserve Force, true?" Sam asked.

"No, not directly in our chain of command. It's all part of the manpower resources that we're given to manage. Though I often liaison directly with SELRES units, the manpower determinations are made by SURFLANT and the major manpower claimant up at Atlantic Fleet headquarters.<sup>21</sup>

"The second way we're different is how we are funded. Reserve ships are only funded for fifty-percent of the operating rate that active ships are. That would be fine if they only deployed at a commensurate ratio, but that is not the case. It's 'one Navy'—that's the way the Navy briefs it and that's the way the admiral wants it. So, the admiral employs his five NRF ships interchangeably with his active ships. The training and work-ups are the same and the CINC should expect the same performance regardless of whether its an active or NRF ship on station. That's not always easy. SELRES rotate on and off the ship at two-to-four week intervals and the disparity in operational funding means that Surface Group TWO and his DESRON commodore's have a tough juggling act to ensure that they are ready and safe to deploy. But that's our problem, not the supported CINC's. Suffice it to say that the admiral has taken it on as a personal goal to correct the active/reserve funding delta." Rick concluded.



“Thanks for the primer, Rick. If we are going to improve retention and efficiency of operations in the group, where are some of the bigger challenges as you see them?” Sam probed.

“Reserves aren’t your challenge but Pascagoula definitely is worth looking at. As Tim will tell you, it’s a real conundrum.” Rick pointed to a map and asked rhetorically: “How do you compare duty in P-goula to life in Norfolk or Mayport? You can’t. Simply stated—P-goula is P-goula—it is its own worst problem. I guess I shouldn’t be on their Chamber of Commerce, eh? Having lived there myself I’ve formed a bit of an opinion. Let me just say that it looks a lot better from Mayport.” Rick chuckled.

“For one thing, P-goula doesn’t have the training infrastructure that the other sites have, although the Group staff is working to improve that and we are enjoying some degree of success, I might add. On the down-side, the school systems aren’t the best and entertainment consists mostly of watching mole crickets eat your lawn. As you know from the legal officer’s briefings, legalized gambling and alcohol is a constant source of problems—not much else to do on liberty. Because of its remoteness, it also lacks the availability for follow-on shore-duty assignments that the fleet concentration areas like Norfolk and Mayport have. The families know that moving there only means moving again at the end of the sea tour.<sup>22</sup> For the families that go, life across the dinner table can get strained. Some Sailors just choose to go unaccompanied rather than put their family through the hassle. Not exactly a poster child for the CNO’s *quality of service* concept, is it?

“There’s more,” Rick continued. “As a bonus, when ships are at home on their inter-deployment training cycle, they’re not really home. They have to travel to train, unlike Mayport or Norfolk where the operating areas and other playmate ships are just beyond the breakwater. Norfolk and Mayport Sailors can get a lot of their training and schools without leaving their homeport—not the case for P-goula folks. Ingalls Shipyard doesn’t offer an availability site for maintenance so when a ship gets an availability period, it has to move to Mobile, Alabama, forty-three miles to the east. Fifty is the breakpoint for per diem so the daily commute is money out of a ship’s company Sailor’s pocket. Last point, all the personnel support for P-goula is in Gulfport, Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> That’s forty-one miles to the west. You’d think we could make it just a little more comfortable for these families? Can’t wait to see what this new individual personnel tempo, or ITEMPO, turns out to be for the Sailors in P-goula. At least we’ll be paying them for their time on the road.”

“I’m hoping you’re going to get to the upside of this.” Sam said, rolling his eyes in mental pain.

“Well, the DESRON commander and ship captains aren’t moored where the Group commander or SURFLANT can look at or visit them all the time. Distance has a *quality of life* all of its own, my friend.” Rick said with the salty smile of a man who once enjoyed time in WESTPAC.

“Yeah, I see your point Rick, but in the interest of operational and training cost-efficiency as well as maintenance economies of scale and retention, why not just move the

staff, these three cruisers and two frigates to Mayport or Norfolk? That would be clearly aligned with the CNO's top five. Don't CINCLANTFLT and SURFLANT make the call for who is based in Pascagoula, Mississippi?"

"So it would seem, Sam. Though CINCLANTFLT and CNO might have the *organize, train, and equip* responsibility; the man behind the curtain on Pascagoula ship-basing matters is Senator Trent Lott (R-MS). Ever heard of him?" Rick smiled and continued. "On the list of battles for the admiral to take on, I don't think he's got enough time in his career to take that one on. There are better places to spend his professional and political capital, I would think. Now I did hear at a CINCLANTFLT material readiness meeting that the submarine folks up in Connecticut, have a similar problem and partnered commercially with General Dynamics to use Electric Boat's empty graving docks to do some shipyard availabilities there. Maybe we need to do something like that."

"Interesting, certainly worth thinking about," Sam thought out loud. Sam thanked Rick for his time and moved along to his next appointment with LCDR Bill "Lamps" Lamprey, the Surface Group's material readiness department head (N4).

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Lamps was new to the job, but as a twelve-year limited duty officer and former enlisted electronics technician, Sam knew he could count on Lamps to have an opinion on force future direction and planning.

"Future direction? You've gotta be kidding me." Lamps scoffed. "I've seen this one before captain—a lot of time and energy spent to produce pretty coffee table pamphlets and little outcome of substance to show for it."

"Lamps, I only know that the Surface Group needs to take a fix and figure out where we are going in the next five-to-ten years. What's your crystal ball telling you about material readiness?" Sam asked.

"It's telling me that these old ships aren't getting any younger and the money pile isn't getting any higher. Look at this ship employment schedule that Commander Bocaccio and the boys over in Operations are dealing with." Lamps said as he slid a schedule over to Sam. "UNITAS demands two ships for five months each year; counter-drug ops requires one 3-D and one 2-D radar-equipped ship on station for a full year; we have one ship devoted to the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic for the year; and Great Lakes cruise keeps one fig on the road for four months.<sup>24</sup> To meet those presence rates within the added TAR constraints means that sixteen ships need to be available during the year. Not much breathing room amidst other scheduled maintenance and upgrades. Throw in "bonus underways" and things get tight on these old ships.

"Quite honestly, not sure any of these ships will even be around in fifteen years, cap'n. They're all pretty old. *Estocin* is planned to be part of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. She's one of the older short hulls but she's a keeper compared to some of the other ships in the Group. SURFLANT himself commanded *Estocin*<sup>25</sup>—a ship with a great

reputation. FFGs are going to be a prime candidate for FMS in the years ahead. *Morrison* is scheduled for decommissioning in 2002. *Doyle* just became an NRF ship in 2001 and *Simpson* becomes an NRF ship in October 2002.<sup>26</sup> The whole Surface Group is a moving target and something's gotta give to make it all work. If we want to do something positive in the way of long-range planning, we'll get out in front of this FMS and decommissioning process and drive the train, where we can."

"Thanks for the rundown, Lamps," Sam said. "I've got to get back to the office and see the admiral off on his trip. We'll talk more. I appreciate your straight-forward and common-sense insights."

In all of his time in the Navy, Sam had never been part of a strategic planning process. He didn't know what one was, or really if Surface Group TWO even needed one. He'd made a cursory look around the waterfront and had even made a call up to the Naval War College to see if they had any knowledge of a plan actually being done at a similar operational level—he'd come up dry.

As he sat in *Bogey's*, Sam pondered the task ahead. On his napkin, he jotted three possible futures that the admiral had mentioned that he consider in his planning (he knew there were plenty others—the mind boggled with possibilities):

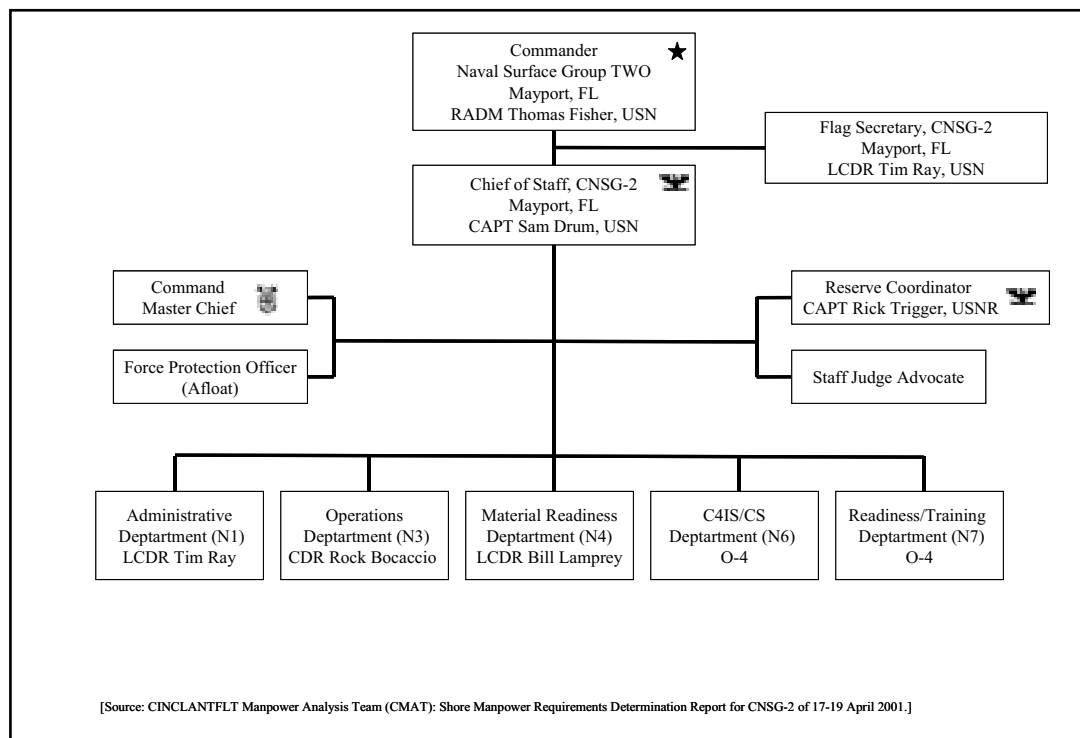
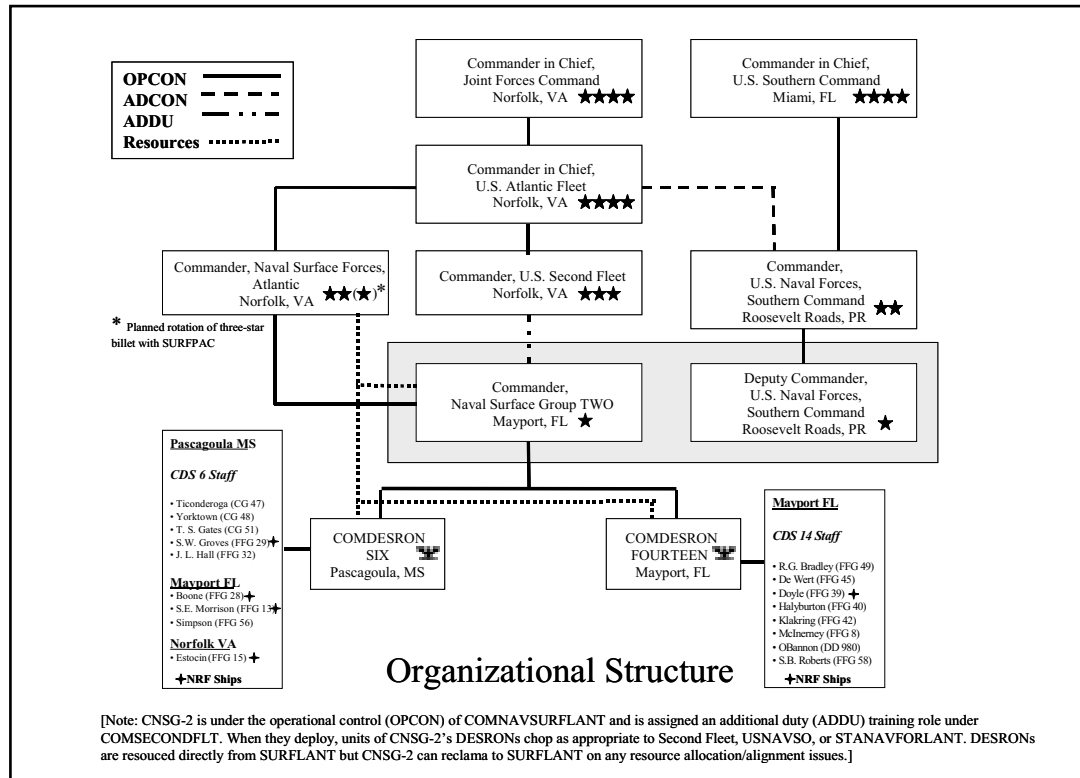
- The first dealt with *more ships*—a larger CNSG, but most likely in the number of NRF ships. An increase to twelve NRF frigates had certainly been talked about in flag conferences and appeared often in the Navy staff and SURFLANT point papers he had seen. That would be a big change for the group. The current funding issues would only be exacerbated. Their role in reserve advocacy would have to increase.<sup>27</sup>
- What would happen if the *counter-drug mission went away*? What would Naval Surface Group TWO do?<sup>28</sup> How should we change now to be able to move smoothly to a new mission?<sup>29</sup> This concern was the premise for the admiral's whole project so he needed to consider that one. What would take its place? What new missions, equipment, or skill sets would that demand?
- Finally, there was the potential that the *total Group might be reduced* to a total of twelve ships as part of a larger force reduction—perhaps as part of the much talked about transformation.<sup>30</sup> DoD would need to get the money for transformation from somewhere. Base closures would gain the Defense Department only some of the money needed to fund large research and development programs. Older ships like those assigned to Surface Group TWO had to look like tempting targets. But twelve



ships total? Not a new idea. DESRON SIX had been Surface Group FOUR until 1993 when similar circumstances drove its re-designation.<sup>31</sup> Would they still need a Group or would that be some sort of a “super-DESRON?”

Just how was he supposed to get his arms around this one? He wondered who should be involved in the Surface Group TWO strategic planning process? Even though he knew that the admiral wasn’t demanding anything for some time, Sam wanted to have a draft plan of action to go over with the admiral upon his return in two weeks. He decided he’d ponder the question further in the place where he’d had most of his greatest victories—knee deep in the Jax Beach surf with his fly rod in hand. Which fly tonight, the deceiver or the popper . . . it’s all in the *details*, Sam thought.





## Notes

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4. "Surface Group TWO Command Brief" provided to author during site visit, Mayport, FL, 2 April 2001.
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7. Commander, Surface Group TWO, 19 December 2001.
8. NAVOP 010/00 of August 2000.
9. Commander, Surface Group TWO, 19 December 2001.
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